



# Asarco fined for health hazards

## Among 30 violations, one is deemed 'willful'

By GRANT SASEK  
IR Staff Writer

EAST HELENA — Proposed fines of \$247,000 have been leveled against Asarco Inc. for allegedly violating various health and safety standards at its plant here.

Word of the fines came Tuesday, one day after Asarco announced the company suffered a net loss of \$31.8 million during the first three months of the year.

The announcement of the proposed penalties was released from the Billings-area office of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

According to David DiTommaso, OSHA's area director in Billings, inspectors have charged Asarco with one "willful violation" of OSHA regulations and 29 other "serious violations."

The more significant willful violation is for allegedly not keeping in working order two vacuum trucks intend-

ed to help reduce workers' exposure to lead, arsenic and cadmium. Asarco had agreed to provide that protection to its workers as part of a 1991 agreement with OSHA.

Many of the alleged serious violations also are for failing to protect workers from harmful chemicals. Other charges focus on exceeding noise standards, not monitoring sulfur dioxide levels and failing to provide a written emergency response plan and training where a release of chemicals could occur.

Asarco has 15 working days to contest the citations or penalties.

Tuesday, officials with the East Helena plant responded to the allegations.

"We pledge to promptly and aggressively address OSHA's concerns to assure that our employees at the East Helena plant continue to work in a safe

and healthy working environment," a press release said. John Shaw, manager of the East Helena plant, cited

**“We pledge to promptly and aggressively address OSHA's concerns ...”**

— A company press release

(More ASARCO, page 8A)

## A rough year ...

■ Jan. 23. Asarco agrees to pay more than \$3 million in penalties to resolve federal allegations of environmental violations at the East Helena plant and other facilities.

■ Feb. 14. It was reported that an estimated 1 million gallons of contaminated water spilled from a broken pipe into the ground beneath the plant.

■ March 3. Asarco's Northern Pacific Reservoir Dam two miles upstream of the plant was declared a high hazard and the reservoir behind the dam was ordered drained until the structure either was repaired or torn down.

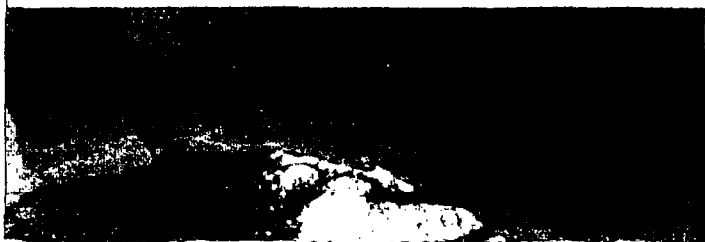
■ April 21. An estimated 400 gallons of sulfuric acid spilled from a broken pipe onto the ground at the plant.

■ April 23. Asarco announced the sale of its Missouri Lead Division, which includes a smelter, refinery and two mines.

■ May 4. Asarco announces the company lost \$31.8 million during the first three months of this year.

■ May 5. OSHA alleges violations of the Occupational Safety and Health Act and proposes penalties of \$247,000.

THE PARK



# No more casinos?

City commissioners plan to institute moratorium on new gambling facilities

Valley residents oppose casino on Montana Avenue

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me," she said. "I support the com-  
mission and trust you to be the  
protectors for the rest of us who  
are not public officials. But you  
have to be the protector of our  
communities, not just for the busi-  
nesses that want to come in.

"Mayor McCarthy said seven  
weeks ago that it was time for  
lively debate on this issue. Here  
we are, two months later, and this  
is the third casino you have had to  
address in the past two weeks. ...  
We have had one meeting for one  
hour. That's not lively community  
debate."

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fences and destruction of the path  
do not interfere with the city's  
present dedicated rights," Hull  
wrote.

Others have argued since the  
trail has been used historically for  
recreation, the public had the right  
to continue that use. Based on that  
argument, previous commission  
members had discussed going so  
far as to condemn the trail for  
public use, but no action ever was  
taken.

Since the closure, new access  
routes have been constructed that  
connect into the Waterline Trail.  
But those are quite steep, which  
limits the ability of some people  
to use the trail.

Casino.  
According to Lynne Grosfield,  
a compliance specialist in the  
department's liquor licensing  
bureau, a hearing on the transfer  
is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. June 4,  
in the auditorium at 111 Sanders.

A hearings examiner will listen  
to both sides of the issue and  
determine whether the transfer  
should be granted, she said.

## Asarco

Continued from Page 1A

recent investments at the plant to  
improve employee safety as an  
example of Asarco's "financial  
commitment" to improving work-  
place safety at the plant.

From 1988 through 1997, Asar-  
co spent more than \$16.5 million  
on capital and operating expenses  
to enhance worker safety at the  
plant, Shaw said.

Shaw also pointed to all-time  
low average blood lead levels  
among the plant's workers and  
decreasing numbers of lost work  
days due to accidents as examples  
of the results of its continuing  
efforts to improve safety.

That will not change, Shaw  
said.

"Asarco's aggressive position  
on safety and health improve-  
ments will continue to be our  
highest priority," Shaw said.

the topic at the Tuesday meeting  
because the issue was not offi-  
cially placed on the commission's  
agenda — the residents simply  
showed up and asked to speak.

Vicki Flies, part owner of the  
Wild Card Casino, declined to  
comment on Tuesday's discus-  
sion because she had not attend-  
ed the commission meeting.

The news of the fines is the  
second bit of bad news Asarco  
supporters have heard this week.

Earlier this week, Asarco offi-  
cials in New York City released  
numbers showing the company  
lost \$31.8 million during the first  
three months of this year.

Fingers were pointed at low-  
metal prices as the principle rea-  
son for the losses.

The average price for copper  
during the first quarter of this year  
was 77 cents a pound. During that  
time period in 1997, copper sold  
for an average of \$1.10 a pound.

Lead sold for 24 cents a pound  
during the first quarter of this  
year, down seven cents a pound  
from a year ago.

Asarco Chairman Richard de J.  
Osborne said while the company's  
operations performed well so far  
this year, those benefits were off-  
set by the decline in metal prices.

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## NOTICE FC

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week's sale  
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• Shocks • Transmissions • Air Conditioning • Nationwide Warranty

**American Car Care Centers.**  
America's Largest Independent Tire Dealer Network  
830 Dealers Nationwide — 10,000 tires sold daily

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**EAGLE TIRE - HELENA**  
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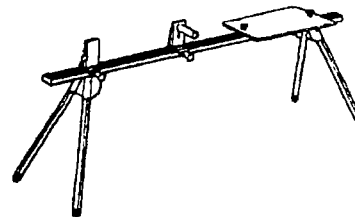
and, Get Ready  
n's Day!"

OFF Ladies' Sportswear



## CORRECTION

The item pictured in Tuesday's  
Power Townsend section of the  
DeWalt DW730 Miter Saw Work  
Station was wrong. The item  
inadvertently pictured was a  
DeWalt DW708 Miter Saw. We  
are sorry for any inconvenience.



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Day: Sund

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